Your Guide To Wee Waa...

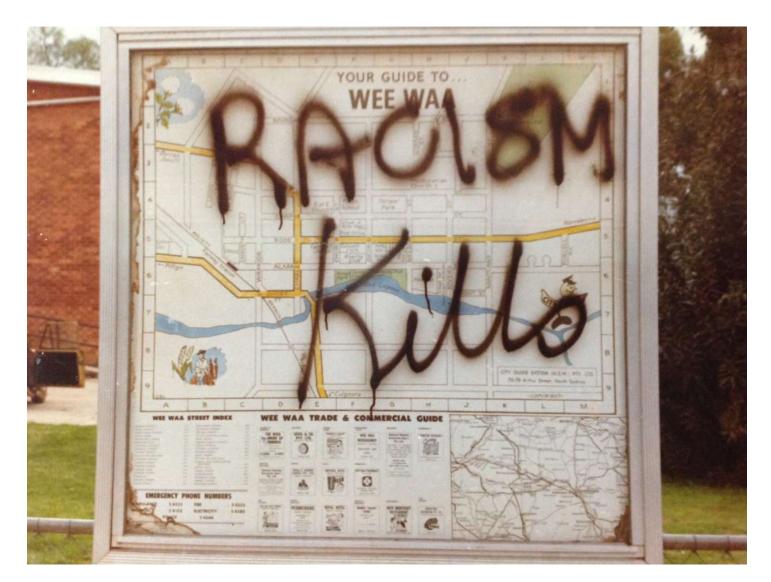
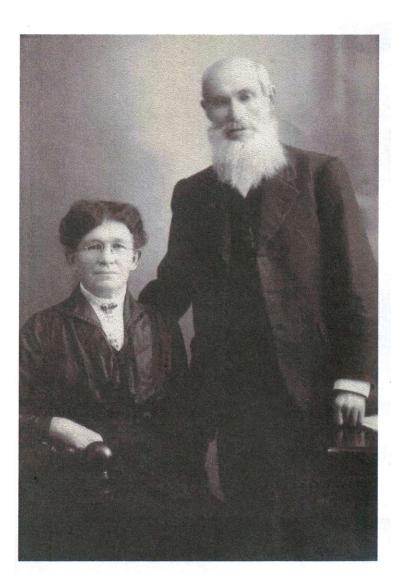


Photo: © Joanna Kelly 1981

Wee Waa is the name of a small country town in north-west New South Wales where I grew up as a kid during the 1950s. The name Wee Waa (pronounced "*Wee-War*") is almost certainly derived from local Aboriginal language but its precise meaning or significance has been lost with the passage of time leaving us with multiple theories about its origin.

My great grandfather was bound for Australia in 1865 on a sailing ship that was blown off course and missed the southern continent entirely. Luckily the voyage eventually made landfall on the southern tip of New Zealand. Some 14 years later in 1879, he married a woman he originally met on that fateful voyage when she was just a child aged eleven. After the arrival of a baby son (my grandfather), the new family made their way to Australia in 1882. They travelled from place to place in north-west New South Wales building bridges. My great grandfather had adapted his skills working as a ship carpenter to constructing wooden bridges.



Margaret Gray (nee Keating) (1854 - 1932) and John Gray (1840 - 1920)

After the tragic death of two of their young children in separate incidents just months apart, my great grandparents decided to purchase a property in 1888 in order to lead a more settled life. This was the same property where I grew up as a fourth-generation family member located a few miles east of Wee Waa on the Namoi River.



A hand-coloured, black & white photo of the house where I grew up taken in the 1890s.

Skip forward to 1961. The thought of leaving "*the land*" hadn't crossed my father's mind until the first of the cotton pioneers from California (Paul Kahl) made a cash offer to buy the family property. Situated on a rich flood plain adjacent to the Namoi River, the soil was well suited to agriculture. Moreover, reliable irrigation was now possible with the completion of the Keepit Dam the year before.

This offer to purchase came completely out of the blue and I'm sure it wasn't any easy decision for my family. However, my father's health concerns most likely tipped the balance. Ironically, he was allergic to many things he came in daily contact with, including the wheat he grew, the horses he rode, the sheep he raised, and the grasses the animals ate. There were even occasions where his allergy to horses caused him to pass out and fall off. So my family decided to move to southern Queensland in August 1961 where my father's health improved dramatically, virtually overnight.

1961 marked the precise moment the cotton-growing industry was kick starting in the Namoi valley. Many of the locals thought the new enterprise would fail in the first few years but to their surprise it succeeded. Moreover it was to become highly successful. So without a doubt, this was a major turning point in history of the area. The cotton industry has been one of the great success stories of Australian agriculture and Wee Waa was at the centre of it all.



In 1962, Wee Waa had a population of 1075 people which would double in the coming years. The rapid rise of this brand new industry had consequences, perhaps not anticipated. Like many small country towns, Wee Waa had a history of racial tension. This was about to come to a head.

As the new cotton industry grew in the 1960s, temporary work camps began to appear around Wee Waa. The cotton farmers depended upon seasonal labourers to chip away the weeds that might otherwise choke the fledgling cotton plants as they matured during the growing season. The nature of the work tended to attract the poorest members of the community, mainly Indigenous Australians. The development of these work camps allowed this itinerant workforce to be close to employers while also allowing them to reach schools and shops in Wee Waa.

By the early 1970s, there were a number of these seasonal work camps established around Wee Waa, including (1) Merah North Camp, (2) Gunidgera ("6 mile") Camp, (3) Tulladunna Lane Camp, (4) Tulladunna Camp, (5) Middle Camp, (6) Collins Bridge Camp, and (7) Myall Vale Camp. They were all relatively close to Wee Waa and some like Tulladunna were located right on the outskirts of town.

The Tulladunna camp was traditionally used by people from Walgett, Goodooga and Brewarrina, and the Gunidgera camp by people from Dubbo, Coonamble, and Gilgandra.



This photo of Collins Bridge a few miles east of Wee Waa is a view from the Collins Bridge Work Camp. Photo: © Peter Gray 1982.

One of the families attracted by the new work opportunities was Arthur and Leila Murray who moved to Wee Waa in 1969 with 12 children (nine girls and three boys). Arthur recalls: "By this time cotton had started being grown in the Wee Waa and Narrabri district so we decided to move to Wee Waa. We both worked there on the cotton fields. I would work all week, and Leila would work on the weekends. We bought two army tents and we lived on the Tulladunna reserve just out of Wee Waa. Our children attended the local school in Wee Waa. Our wage was \$20 for both of us for 12 hours' work. We would work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m."

The filmmaker, John Pilger, a friend of the Murray family, wrote: "In 1969, he (Arthur) and Leila had brought their family to the town of Wee Waa in outback New South Wales and camped beside the Namoi River. Arthur worked in the cotton fields for a flat rate of A\$1.12 an hour. Only itinerant blackfellas were recruited for such a pittance; only whites had unions in the land of 'fair go'."

Arthur Murray: "As the cotton grew bigger and more widespread many Aboriginals came to the district for employment. I would say for sure that as many as 2000 to 3000 Aboriginals would come each season for employment. Some would go back to their home towns and many would stay in Wee Waa. Many Aboriginals made Wee Waa a permanent place to live, as we did. We had to make our own toilets on the reserve, and carry wood and water from the river for washing and cooking."

John Pilger: "Working conditions in the cotton fields were primitive and dangerous. "The crop-sprayers used to fly so low," Arthur told me, "we had to lie face down in the mud or our heads would've been chopped off. The insecticide was dumped on us, and for days we'd be coughing and chucking it up." In 1973, a Sydney University study reported its "astounded" finding of fish floating dead on the surface of the Namoi River, poisoned by the "utterly mad, uncontrolled" level of spraying, which continued."

Arthur Murray: "I took on the farmers about higher wages and shorter hours through the Australian Workers Union. We then protested to the local shire council for better living conditions, to the Housing Commission for some housing, and also for medical treatment for our sick children and the elderly. We made an arrangement to meet the leader of the cotton growers, Mr Paul Kahl, the local doctor Dr. Penny, shire councillor Mr Ron Brady and church leader Mr Murray Ramage. So a meeting was called for all concerned."

Arthur Murray: "A committee named the Aboriginal Advancement Association was set up. Funds were allocated and an office was rented I formed an employment office to deal with employment for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, including some other ethnic groups that came to the district seeking employment. Rather than go to the CES office at Narrabri, the itinerant workers would come to us and we would direct them toward work."

In 1973, Arthur Murray lead the cotton chippers on strike for better pay and working conditions. Also to end aerial spraying of the cotton with poisons like DDT while workers were working in the fields. The Wee Waa Echo newspaper called them "radicals and professional troublemakers", adding that "it is not fanciful to see the Aboriginal problem as the powder keg for Communist aggression in Australia".

Lyall Munro Jnr : "I remember in 1972 in Wee Waa with the cotton, Blacks were working for a dollar an hour, ten dollars a day. Arthur's family, along with the Flick family, Michael Anderson and and myself created the Wee Waa Aboriginal Cotton Chippers Caucus and took some 1700 cotton chippers on strike and was responsible for the award they now work under."

John Pilger: "Arthur and the cotton-chippers made history. They went on strike, and more than 500 of them marched through Wee Waa. Abused as "boongs" and "niggers", the Murrays' riverside camp was attacked and the workers' tents smashed or burned down."

Michael Anderson, who was one of those who set up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972 commented: "My auntie and uncle Isabell and Jo Flick told me I needed to get out of the Tulladunna camp because my life was under threat. On the evening I relocated from my tent at the cotton chippers camp to their house in Wee Waa, the people on Tulladunna Reserve thought I was killed in my tent, because a 4WD had pulled up and two shot gun blasts were fired into the tent and the people said a white 4WD had sped off into the darkness."

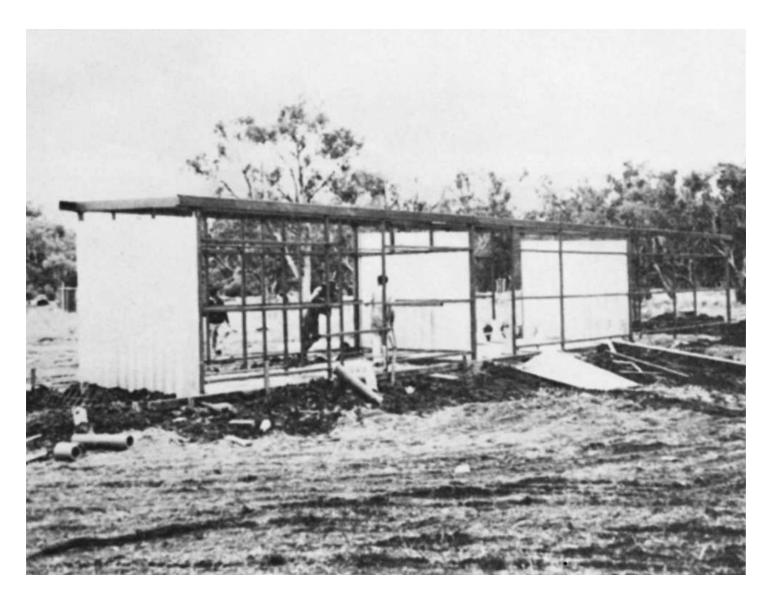
John Pilger: "Soon after the cotton workers won an hourly rate of A\$1.45."

Arthur Murray: "The local police had to be onside with the local whites, and most of the time they made a wrong out of a right, by arresting Aboriginal people and charging them with offences like drunk and disorderly, stealing etc. I then arranged to employ an Aboriginal Legal Service field officer from Moree (Mr Jack Smith) to work with us to stop some of the foolish attacks towards Aboriginals. I knew what was wrong, and I had to make it right."

Along with the field officer from the Aboriginal Legal Service, Arthur also arranged for a team from the Aboriginal Medical Service to be stationed at Wee Waa during the chipping season.

John Pilger: "Although food was collected for the strikers, hunger united their families. Leila would wake before sunrise to light a wood fire that cooked the little food they had and to heat a 44-gallon drum, cut in half lengthways, and filled with water that the children brought in buckets from the river for their morning bath. With her ancient flat iron she pressed their clothes, so that they went to school "spotless", as she would say."

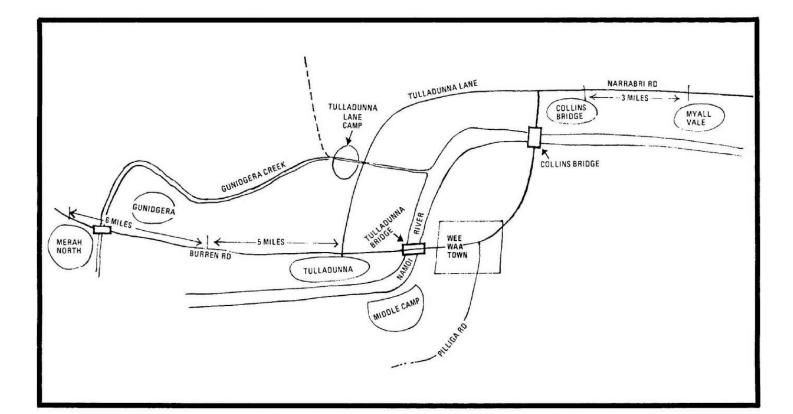
As a direct result of their campaign, the Australian Government provided a \$50,000 grant to improve the facilities at three of the camps, Tulladunna, Gunidgera, and Myall Vale. This provided better access roads, fencing, a bore water supply, toilet buildings with cesspits, and showers and laundry facilities.



Shower and laundry facilities under construction at the Tulladunna workers camp in August 1973. Photo: "New Dawn" magazine.

At Tulladunna, an area had been fenced in and an all-weather road built. Inside the fence 10 scattered toilet buildings were built, and a structure containing 12 shower cubicles (6 for men and 6 for women) and 4 laundry tubs.

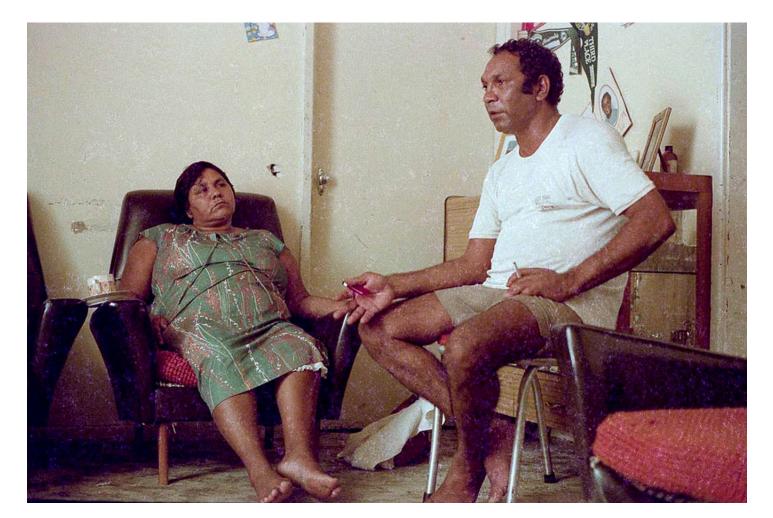
In mid-September 1973, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs made a further grant to Namoi Shire Council to build two blocks of showers and laundry facilities at Myall Vale camp.



Mud map from "New Dawn" magazine, 1973.

The Murrays also fought for Aboriginal housing in the town so families did not have to continue living at these makeshift work camps.

Arthur Murray: "We were the last family to leave the reserve to live in town amongst the white people. Not that it mattered much, but it was good to live under a roof with electricity and water laid on, and out of the cold with the children."



*Leila and Arthur Murray at their house in Wee Waa which they occupied after 1975.* Photo:© Joanna Kelly 1981.

Arthur Murray: "After moving into the house, I kept on performing my duty for the Aboriginal community doing what I thought best. I've had my share of troubles with the uptown niggers, the racist whites and most of all the police. The police would make a comment such as: 'Spending taxpayers' money again, A. Murray, bailing out drunks.' Sure I used to bail Aboriginals out of jail, because we were employing them."

"Our organisation was well respected by all Aboriginals. It wasn't a radical organisation. All that we wanted was to be shown fair and honest respect by all people black and white."

Many years later, Arthur's eldest daughter said: "He was somebody who earned the respect of many people. He was one of the fighters. He was always one of those ones who worried about Aboriginal rights."

Arthur, a father of 12, instilled in his kids the need for respect and honour for their Aboriginal heritage and culture, and said education was the way to a better life as an Aboriginal person.

In June 1982, Arthur and Leila were enjoying a visit from their secondeldest son, Eddie, who was now 21. He was busy making a new life for himself now that he was entering adulthood. He had worked as a fruitpicker in the Riverina area and sometimes as a cotton chipper around Wee Waa to be closer to his family. Now he lived and worked in Sydney and was staying with his aunty Pam in the suburb of St Peters in Sydney.

Eddie had left home in the mid-1970s to do a basic welding course in Newcastle. He later moved to Sydney where he played rugby league with the Redfern *All Blacks*. He was thrilled to be playing rugby league with an Agrade team and was especially proud of this achievement. He felt sure he would be picked for a team soon to tour New Zealand.

Eddie was an easy-going, happy go lucky, jokey sort of character by nature, and was especially excited about the prospect of the upcoming tour. After helping his mother hang out the washing in the morning, Eddie walked into town and meet some of his mates for a drink, perhaps to celebrate his anticipated tour to New Zealand. He joined his brothers, cousin, and several friends, firstly at Dangar Park and then later at the levee which was a place where Aborigines frequently drank together away from interference by the police.

Later that day, Eddie's little sister, Eileen, the youngest Murray daughter, waited for Eddie to meet her after school to walk her home. She looked forward to this special time they shared together when Eddie was in town. To Eileen's delight, he'd do fun things like stopping to swing her around in circles during the walk home. However, Eddie didn't show up that day, so Eileen walked home by herself. Upon her arrival, her sister, Helen, broke the news to her, saying "*Eddie's not coming any more. He's in heaven now*." Both sisters immediately burst into tears.



The Imperial Hotel in Wee Waa.

While wheeling her baby in a pram, Anne Murray was the last member of her family to see her brother alive on the corner of George Street opposite the Imperial Hotel in Wee Waa. Anne remembers: "*He was fine, happy as always. Next thing we get a call that he committed suicide in a police cell. I know he couldn't have, he wouldn't have. There's no way*."

At some time after 1.30 pm, Eddie tried to enter the Imperial Hotel, probably to use the toilet. The publican, Jack Molyneux, saw him enter and told Eddie to leave the premises. And argument ensued. After he was locked out, Eddie tried to force his way back in through the main entrance from Rose Street. Molyneux asked the barmaid, Beryl Berger, to call the police, and officers arrived shortly afterwards.

Anne Murray: "My brother did not hang himself. He was a happy go lucky, typical brother, who loved his family dearly. ...It is not true, he was

murdered, and everyone in Wee Waa knows it, we know it, the police who killed him know it and it is time Australia should know it."

Arthur Murray collapsed upon hearing the news his son was dead. The ambulance that had just delivered Eddie's body to the morgue returned to take Arthur to hospital.

None of the Murray family believed Eddie would have harmed himself. There had been nothing to indicate Eddie was unhappy let alone suicidal. He had booked his train ticket back to Sydney and was excited about the prospect of touring with the Redfern *All Blacks* to New Zealand.

There was an immediate and spontaneous reaction to the devastating news as it swept around the small town. Three shop windows were broken as a protest against Eddies death. Lyall Combo, one of Eddie's drinking companions that day, was arrested for the incident.

Years later, a Royal Commission into his death concluded: "There is no evidence to suggest that Eddie was suicidal, i.e., likely to deliberately kill himself. His father, Arthur Murray, and friend, Lyall Combo, knew of no reason why he would kill himself. Eddie's uncle, Allan Murray, thought he was incapable of suicide. Dr. Mulvey from his treatment of Eddie knew of no reason why Eddie would want to take his own life. There is no evidence of anything in Eddie's background that would suggest he wanted to kill himself. In fact, at the time of his death, to most people, he seemed happy."

Arthur Murray: "He was supposed to be a first-grade footballer. He achieved that in a way when he played for the All Blacks at Red Field. He was offered a chance to go over to NZ with the Aboriginal All Blacks. But his death denied him of that."

Anne remembered: "When I saw him outside the Imperial Hotel he was wearing creamy pants, his red and white shirt with the writing across it, Walgett Leagues. When I next saw my brother, he was at the Coroner's. He was not wearing his clothes. He was bare from the waist up and I could see marks around his neck and bruises on his chest. The pants the coppers dressed him in were too big and too long, hanging over his feet, he had no shoes or socks. I asked for his clothes, where are his clothes? They would not respond. What happened to his clothes? What happened to his personal effects? His wallet has never been returned to us. Why?"

Anne Murray: "Before a police photographer arrived to take pictures of Eddie, his body had been removed from the cell in which he died. The next day his clothes were missing. When the Coroner looked into the matter, he found instances of unreliability in the evidence offered by police to the Court."

"The clothes were the most vital forensic evidence, they could have determined what happened, they would have been covered in blood – proof that he did not suicide. Eddie would never take his life, that's a dirty lie by them. He was liked and loved, a champion rugby league player. Obviously the clothes were hidden and then destroyed. We want to know by whom, it's not hard as there weren't many officers on duty. We get this investigated and we have the murderers."

John Pilger: "The enemies Arthur and his comrades made were the Australian equivalent of those standing in the way of Martin Luther King's civil rights campaigners in the United States. They were the police, local politicians, the media. "Who in the town was with you?" I asked Arthur. He thought for a while. "There was a chemist," he said. "who was kind to Aboriginal people. Mostly we were on our own."

One night, the police rolled up at the Murray house and told Arthur to go and get his daughter out of the police van. Arthur went out to find his daughter, Anne, covered in blood.

The family was regularly harassed or threatened by the local police. Two weeks before Eddie's death they told Arthur that were going to "get" either him or his son. A threat that proved profoundly prophetic.

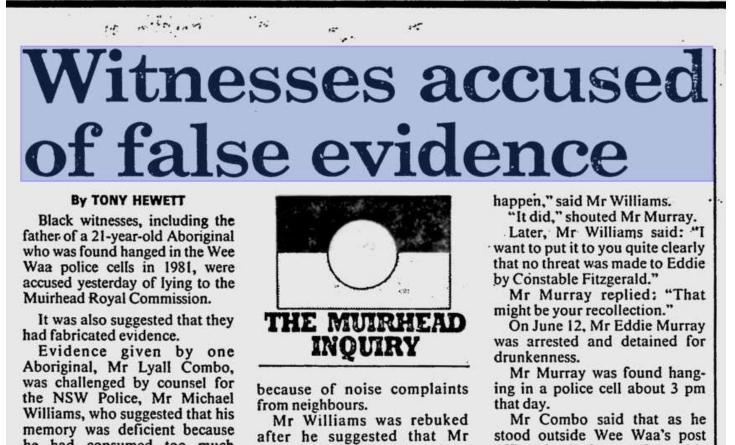
When police picked him up, witnesses say that they chanted repeatedly, "Come on Eddie Murray, we want you, Come on Eddie Murray, we want you", as they were singling out their target. Eddie's cousin, Don Murray, was drinking with him at the time. Donnie said to police: "Take me also I'm more drunk than him", to which the police replied "No we only want the one."

Eddie Murray was not arrested but detained under the NSW Intoxicated Persons Act and placed in "preventive detention" rather than simply taken home. Arthur Murray: "*They could have brought him home. We only live just up the road. There was no need whatsoever to detain him and lock him in the cell.*"

At the time, according to the 1981-82 Bureau of Crime Statistics report, the rate of detention of Aboriginal people in north-western NSW under the Intoxicated Persons Act was 93 times the overall State rate – they were being consistently locked up around the clock.

Anne Murray: "(The police) detained him for being drunk and disorderly. The police could have taken him home but instead kept him in custody. He was heard to cry out from his cell, 'Why do you always pick on me? Why don't you pick on the white people?' Less than one hour later, he was dead."

Arthur Murray and other members of the family, "...*recalled conversations with Eddie in which he stated that he had been pressured and threatened by Constable Rodney Fitzgerald.*" Several witnesses testified that Wee Waa Constable Rodney Fitzgerald was one of the officers who detained Eddie, but Fitzgerald denied this saying he did not arrive at work until afterwards. After weighing up all the evidence as to his whereabouts, Justice Muirhead accepted Fitzgerald's account.



he had consumed too much alcohol since Mr Eddie Murray was found hanged on June 12, 1981.

Arthur Murray, Mr Murray's father, constantly had to raise his voice to protest at suggestions put to him by Mr Williams, who cross-examined him on whether his son had been harassed by a Wee Waa police constable, Rodney Fitzgerald. Mr Murray told the commis-

sion that Constable Fitzgerald, who is said to have threatened Eddie Murray on three separate occasions, had visited his Wee Waa home on March 24, 1981 Murray and his son abused the officer.

Constable Fitzgerald arrived at the home as Mr Murray and his son were drinking on the front lawn. The officer offered them a cigarette and beckoned them over. He then tried to arrest them, according to Mr Murray who told Mr Williams to listen to "his version" of the incident.

The two Aborigines were chased to their front door by Constable Fitzgerald and Mr Murray slipped and injured his leg, he told the commission. There were no arrests. "I put it to you that it did not office, he had seen Constable Fitzgerald, driving a police van, arrive at the Imperial Hotel, where Mr Murray was arguing with a barmaid, about 1.30 pm. At the 1982 coroner's inquest, Mr Fitzgerald denied that he had

taken part in Mr Murray's arrest. Another witnesses, Mr Christopher Winters, also told the commission yesterday that he had seen Constable Fitzgerald arrive in a police van and help arrest Mr Murray. A third witness, Ms Cheryl

Gordon, said she saw an officer whom she thought was Constable Fitzgerald.

## Sydney Morning Herald, 2 March 1988

The Murray family members were often singled out for racist harassment, especially by the police. Like his parents, Eddie also talked openly about the discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people in Wee Waa. Eddie was no stranger to being arrested or detained by the local police. Eddie had been arrested seven times since 1977 for drunkenness and had been detained three times under the Intoxicated Persons Act.

Justice Muirhead: "The Wee Waa police records show that Eddie had two convictions recorded against him for offensive behaviour, seven for drunkenness, three detentions under the Intoxicated Persons Act, and a charge of serious harm and affront that had not been finalised at the time of his death."

This was in stark contrast to his life in Sydney where he never had any trouble with the police although these bouts of binge drinking was more of a phenomenon of his life in Wee Waa.

Clearly, there was a lot of anger and resentment towards the Murray family for doing nothing more than simply looking after their own interests. There can be little doubt that there was resentment by some locals who wanted to dissuade Arthur from being an effective campaigner and successful organiser on behalf of his People.

The next day the family, in the company of Lyall Munro Snr., viewed the body. Later they went to the police station. The police showed them the blanket they claimed Eddie had torn strips from to hang himself.

Anne Murray recalled: "The cop pulled out the grey blanket he claimed Eddie hung himself with. I tried to tear at it, and I turned around to the cop and said how did Eddie tear this when I can't tear it, it needs scissors to cut through it. And I said to him that we can see by the nature of the broken threads that it has been cut by scissors."

Apart from the claims made by the police themselves, no other person was witness to the alleged hanging; including a doctor who pronounced him dead at the scene and an ambulance officer who was called to remove the body. After reading the numerous accounts about Eddie's death, we are left with a graphic image of Eddie with his head in a noose hanging from the ventilation grill above his cell door with his feet touching the ground. If the cause of death was something other than a suicidal hanging, there would be little reason to go to the trouble of actually staging a fake hanging since nobody saw it or any photographs taken.

Anne Murray: "Every time I talk about things it makes me cry, but it needs to be told. Tell you the truth, I think about it every day. At night I see him laying in the morgue. I can see his face, see it clearly."

At the 1981 Coronial Inquest, the verdict was inconclusive. It found that Eddie "*died at his own hand or the hand of person or persons unknown*." The counsel for the Murray family, Kevin Coorey said it better when he submitted to the Royal Commission in Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that Eddie "*died at the hand of a police officer or police officers unknown*."

At the original inquest, the coroner strongly criticised the police. He described the police evidence as "highly suspicious" and their records were found to have been falsified. The coroner concluded there was no evidence that Eddie Murray took his own life. Medical experts agreed that it was improbable that someone with a blood alcohol level of 0.3 could decide to hang himself and actually carry out that intention.

Anne Murray: "I want the police to be charged, they gotta be charged. I want people to bring back the things that they stole from our family."

Arthur Murray: "When the inquest was held in Narrabri and Sydney, the coroner found that Eddie had died by the hand of some person or persons unknown. So the coroner's finding was an open verdict. I was never satisfied with the way the investigation went on by the police."

Arthur Murray: "They (police) didn't worry. They didn't think that we would pursue it further, which we did."

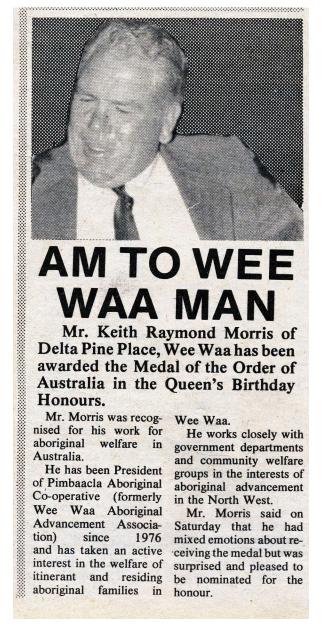
Leila Murray: "I think the police got a shock when we wanted an investigation into our son's death, because we knew that our son wouldn't take his own life."

Arthur Murray: "Eddie's death made me so much more determined to fight back more strongly. We wanted to find out the truth of how Eddie's life was taken. We believed Eddie was killed in custody, and that is a belief we still have."

Leila Murray: "They're killing Aboriginal people, just killing us."



Four days before Eddie died in police custody, Keith Morris was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) on the Queen's Birthday on 8th June 1981. The governor of N.S.W. presented the OAM medal to him. Morris was the very first resident of the Wee Waa district to receive a Queen's honours award. The citation stated: "*For services in the field of Aboriginal welfare*."

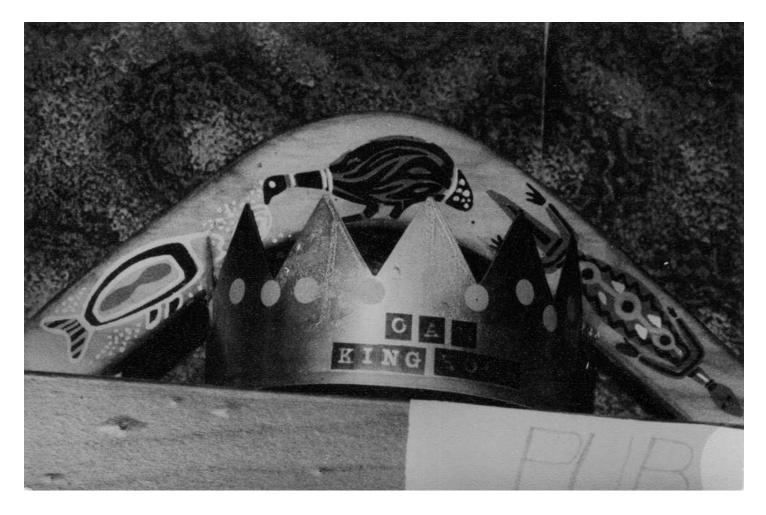


North Western Courier (front page) 16 June 1981

Keith Morris and Arthur Murray were old friends who enjoyed an 'easy familiarity'. Keith Morris had married Jean Sands who had grown up with Arthur Murray on Angedool Reserve near Lightning Ridge. As part of the team with Arthur and others, Keith Morris played a significant role in helping the Indigenous cotton chippers to improve their lot in life. This of course led to the same sort of racist backlash that all Indigenous progressives faced in Wee Waa.



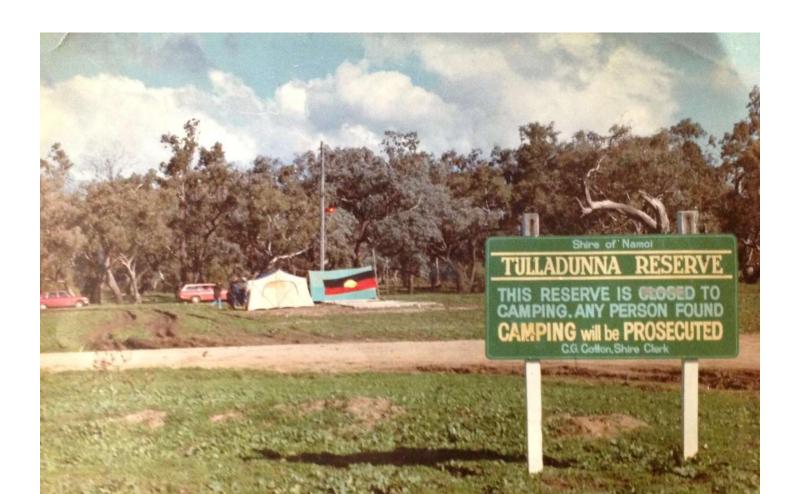
The publican from the Royal Hotel made a cardboard crown to mock Morris's well-deserved OAM award. Keith Morris was dubbed "King Koon". This disrespectful slap in the face was on public display sitting on a shelf nestled among the bottles of liquor behind the bar. Should anyone call this a racist slur, the publican had an easy way out by claiming it was just a joke and he was simply pulling Morris's leg in the spirit of good fun. Of course, this excuse sounded pretty hollow to many people, even in racist Wee Waa.



The label reads 'OAM' 'KING KOON'. Photo: © Peter Gray 1982

Just prior to the tragic events in the Wee Waa jail, the Namoi Shire Council had closed the Tulladunna camp. The council argued it was "unsightly" and wanted the workers to be moved to a newly created Aboriginal Reserve much further out of town. Aboriginal protesters hoped to counter this closure by conducting a sit-in at Tulladunna that would bring publicity to the issue and hopefully prompt the council to reconsider their decision before the beginning of the next summer-chipping season.

Karen Flick was among the protesters. She argued that the sit-in was about land rights and self-determination, adding that Aboriginal people deserved greater recognition for their contribution to the cotton industry.

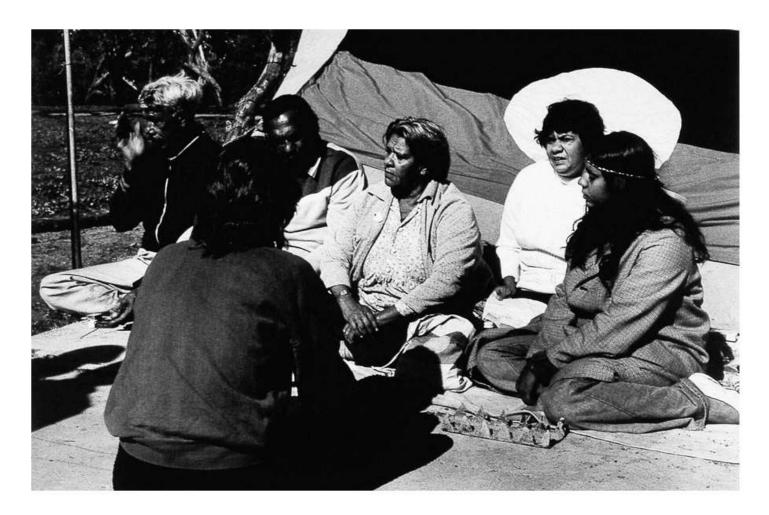


## The protest camp at Tulladunna. Photo: © Stephen Robinson 1981

Karen recalled: "We had been talking about land matters I guess around Wee Was for a long time, and then the council started to close down some of the camping areas saying it was unhealthy or something like that, it was not fit for people and the water was buggered up. But they had buggered the water up themselves, through the run off of the chemicals they used on the cotton! So we campaigned around the land issue – it was about challenging the local council that Tulladunna had to be left open because for people who come there and work, seasonally on the cotton chipping, that was the place that they would stay. So, we had a responsibility to keep Tulladunna open."

"Then Eddie Murray was killed in June and that involved our family and the Murray family big time obviously. I remember the day that Helen Murray, his sister, came around and said to Mum and Aunty Iz, 'You got to come! You got to come! Eddie's dead', so they just jumped in the car and went up there. And then all the other things that happened after that, it was very intense, it was very difficult to go through that."

"It was all that small town stuff, you know, that was really raw and red for me. Because all we were doing was sitting on our country, standing up for our rights and challenging the authorities about the death and what had happened."



Left to Right: Joe Flick, Arthur Murray (partly obscured), Isabel Flick, Barbara Flick and Karen Flick. Jenny Brockie is sitting with her back to camera reporting for ABC news. Photo:© Joanna Kelly 1981.

The metal spike-array sitting in front of Karen Flick is a weapon designed to puncture car tires. This tire shredder was found nearby concealed as a booby trap on the road as you approach the camp.

Namoi Shire President, Norman Sweetman, appeared to have little understanding of what was happening around him. He commented: "*I'm not that conversant with ... Aboriginal land rights ...*" *he said.* "*... we hear a lot, we read a lot, some of it may be right, but I wondering perhaps if they had a retrospective of what would have happened if Australia ... wasn't settled by the British ... (It) would have been taken over by the yellow races north of Australia, wouldn't it? ... It was the British flock that protected the land for them.*" When it was pointed out that the British had taken land from Aboriginal people as well as protecting it, Sweetman *replied, "Well, what do you mean by take? Where did they take it away. Can you tell me where they have taken it away?*"

A member of Madeline McGrady's video crew who was there documenting the event commented: ".....standing on the land at Tulladunna at night, everybody around me, men, women, children scared and worried that the headlights coming down a lonely dark road belonged to whoever it was that had the shotgun, returning."

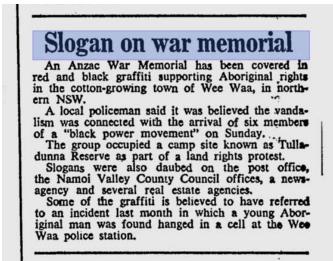
Kevin Cook: "That car come that night. Tried to run over the tents. One of the Koorie lads from Tranby was sleeping in it. He jumped up and chased the car, banged on it with his fists on the windows... I thought he'd be knocked ass over head, jeez he was close to getting knocked over."

During the second week of the sit-in at Tulladunna, many shops in Wee Waa, along with the town's war memorial, were graffitied during the night. They were spray painted with red, black and yellow paint on Saturday night 4th July 1981. Residents awoke to find a range of slogans which included: "What Kills Black Babies: Napalm in Vietnam, Cotton Chemicals in Wee Waa"; "Cops are Murderers"; "Pay The Rent You Are On Black's Land"; "Racism Kills"; and "Land Right Now!"



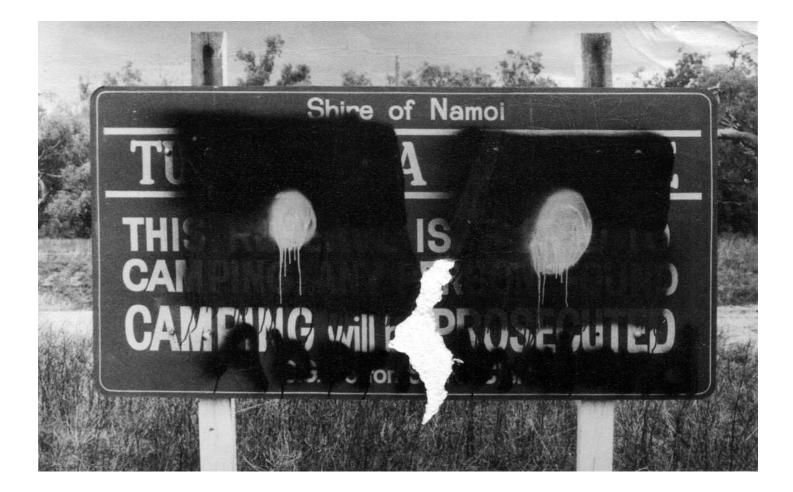
Photo:© Stephen Robinson 1981

Namoi Shire Council offered a \$2000 reward for the arrest of the



Sydney Morning Herald, 7 July 1981.

The backlash to the spray-painting incident was so severe, the sit-in was abandoned a few days later on 8 July 1981. The camp was relentlessly attacked Klu-Klux-Klan style, usually under the cover of darkness. The protesters feared for their lives or the risk of great bodily harm, so a strategic retreat and a regrouping was considered an appropriate tactical response under the circumstances.



The council sign was spray painted with two Aboriginal flags and the word "Aboriginaland" underneath. Photo:© Peter Gray 1982

Arthur Murray: "After Eddie's death we couldn't live in Wee Waa because of the great harassment we got from the police and people of Wee Waa, so we arranged to get a transfer to Dubbo, a bigger town in the central west. We thought we would not be recognised there, but after the Brewarrina incident my name came up once again, having been charged for something I've never done and for forming and leading a group to set up a Royal Commission into Aboriginals Deaths in Custody."

Isabel Flick was a pillar of support to the Murray family following Eddie's death. She said: "When the Coroner's Court was going to be shifted down to Sydney, we realised then that the Murray family wasn't going to get the kind of support that we were hoping. They were so upset, you know, they needed to be taken to and from the court and looked after all the time, because they were in a sick state really. And we were the ones trying to do all of that. So we said: 'Oh, we'll have to contact Kevin (Cook) and see what he can do'. At the time, the Murray family didn't know about Tranby."

"And so it worked out that Kevin had a bus there to meet us at the train. 'Cause on the trip down, we were all sitting up on the train all through the night, and we were all pretty knocked out by the time we got here. And then I was thinking about how hard it was that we had to get down here to the court, and this is the mother and father of the boy that's been killed and their family. We weren't worried about ourselves, we were just thinking: 'How can we make it better for them?' And then Kevin sorted it all out for us, met us at the railway. And took us over to Tranby with this big breakfast ready and everybody was able to freshen up a bit and go on down to the Coroner's Court there. So, that sort of eliminated a lot of worry for us with that."

Kevin Cook: "I remember being at the second part of Eddie Murray's inquest at Glebe. The family broke down and just sobbed and sobbed and you know it just broke your heart. It was the worse thing watching them, seeing how it affected them..."

John Pilger: "Leila could not read, yet this remarkable woman memorised almost every document and judgement."

Isabel Flick: "Because after the inquest, with that 'Open' verdict, we couldn't just let it go. We wanted to go on and try to push to find out what really happened. But to go on to try to set up the push for a Royal Commission into the Deaths in Custody was a pretty full-on sort of decision for us."

Karen Flick: "And it was important for us, for me anyway, to make sure politicians heard Black voices, cause they can easily be dismissive you know..."

Karen Flick: "I remember talking to Gerry Hand, Clyde Holding, two of the federal ministers we went through during that period. They were fairly dismissive until we began to show there was not just one case – and we were building on it all the time, showing them – 'Here's another case, and here's another one'. ... So that built the case, at the Royal Commission."

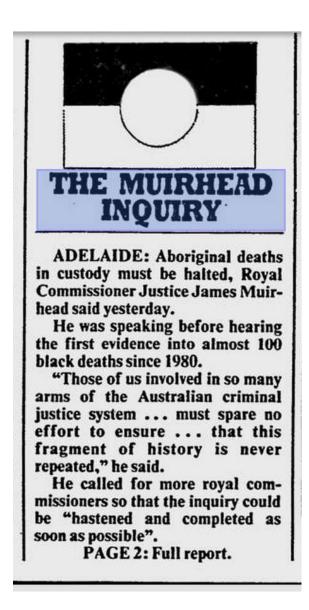
In Western Australia, for example, where Aborigines comprise 2.7 per cent of the population, they accounted for more than one-third of the prison population in 1986.

On 10 August 1987, Prime Minister Bob Hawke announced the formation of a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of deaths of Aboriginals while in custody. The inquiry was a response to a public outcry over an alarming number of deaths in custody, often under suspicious circumstances.

Justice Muirhead was chosen to head the Royal Commission because he had a reputation in Aboriginal affairs. Hearings began in 1988. The commission initially set out to examine 44 specific cases but that grew to ninety-nine cases, 32 in Western Australia, 27 in Queensland, 21 in South Australia and the Northern Territory and 19 across NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. The cases spanned a 10-year period between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989, and included the death of Eddie Murray in 1981 at the Wee Waa police station.

John Pilger: "Arthur and Leila set out on an extraordinary journey for justice for their son and their people. They endured the ignorance and

indifference of white society and its multi-layered political and judicial bureaucracies. They won a royal commission, only to see the royal commissioner, a judge, suddenly appointed to a top government administrative job in the critical final stages of the hearing."



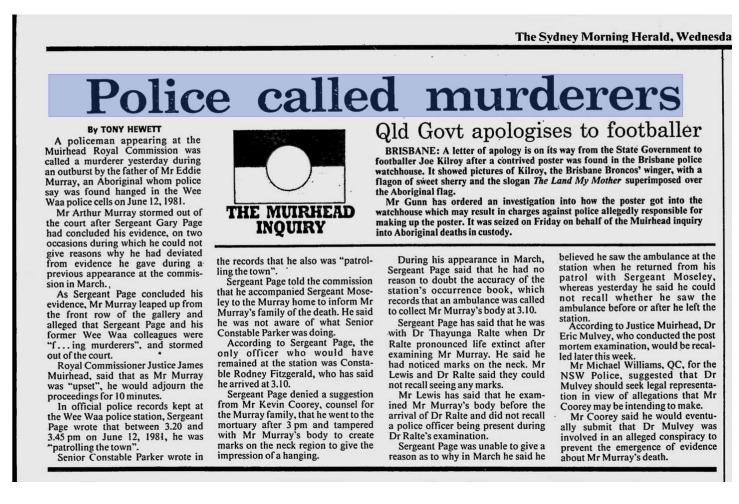
Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 1988

The final report of the Commission released on 15 April 1991 was 5 volumes in length. The Commission concluded that the 99 deaths investigated were not due to police violence: "... the immediate causes of the deaths do not include foul play, in the sense of unlawful, deliberate killing of Aboriginal prisoners by police and prison officers. More than one-third of the deaths (37) were from disease; 30 were self-inflicted hangings; 23 were caused by other forms of external trauma, especially head injuries; and 9 were immediately associated with dangerous alcohol and other drug use. Indeed, heavy alcohol use was involved in some way in deaths in each of these categories. The chapter concludes that glaring deficiencies existed in the standard of care afforded to many of the deceased."

Leila Murray: "Ever since that time we have had trouble in our family with police harassment. Our other son, Rodney, was bashed by police in 1988, both his kidneys were damaged for life." This happened while the Royal Commission was in progress.

In the end, the commission cost about \$40 million, with another \$400 million spent on trying to implement its 339 recommendations. Those recommendations are still valid today, but very few have been implemented effectively. Every year, Aboriginal people continue to die in custody.

Arthur Murray said that the Royal Commission: "In my son's case it was just like having Eddie dug up and buried over and over again. In terms of justice, well the experience I got out of it was really nothing. The amount of money that they spent on the Royal Commission was I believe just a waste of money."



Sydney Morning Herald, 11 May 1988

In his interim report in December 1988, Muirhead wrote: "I am confident a significant number of deaths have their roots not only in health issues, but in the very despair of individuals, in frustration, in anger, in legal practices and procedures in which many Aborigines have no confidence."

The original post-mortem examination by Dr. Eric Mulvey had mysteriously disappeared and was never presented to the Muirhead inquiry. A former NSW Health Department pathologist said to the Royal Commission that Dr. Mulvey's post-mortem report was "*meagre, incompetent and inadequate.*" The Coroner's report failed to evaluate obvious bruises and marks on parts of Eddie's body other than his neck.

In 1988, Arthur Murray said: "Despite one year into the Royal Commission and evidence building up as to an unnatural hand by police officers in the death of his son, that no police officer had been pulled up on charges."

It was a commonly held belief that the Royal Commission could be an instrument in effecting change for the better. But no police were charge with any crime that most other citizens on the same body of evidence would have been convicted.

Arthur Murray: "They did nothing. Of the 99 cases that were heard before the royal commission, a lot should still be investigated because no police and no prison officers have been charged with any offences."

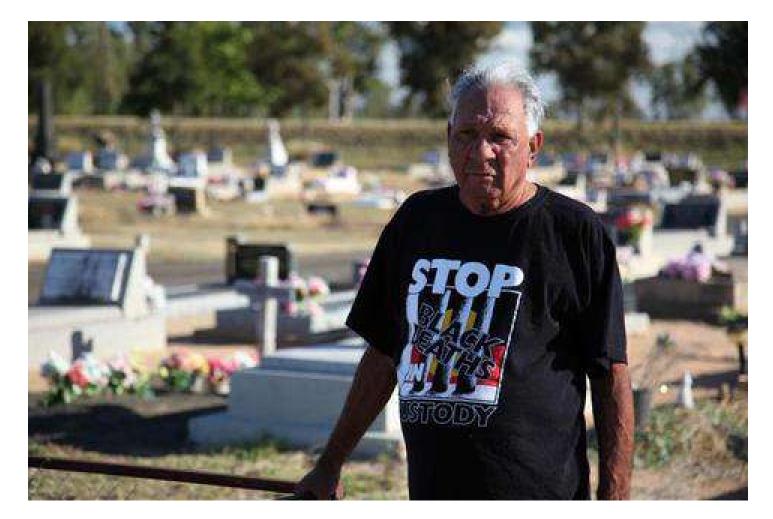
Leila Murray added: "They criticised the police and done nothing about it."

Arthur Murray summed it up by saying: "*Where's the justice in this country*?"

Aboriginal deaths in custody have risen by 150% since the Royal Commission was completed in 1991, although less were in police custody and more in prisons.

In 1997, the NSW Coroner gave approval for Eddie's remains to be exhumed under the supervision of the NSW Institute of Forensic Medicine, a

painful and traumatic experience for the family.



Arthur Murray at the Wee Waa cemetery.

Simon Luckhurst: "On 19 November a hessian barrier was erected around Eddie's grave site in the barren surrounds of the Wee Waa cemetery. Before the digging started, Aboriginal elder Roy Barker performed an additional cleansing ceremony. He lit green gum leaves so that thick smoke climbed into the sky. In Aboriginal tradition this smoke takes with it sins and ghosts, and Arthur watched as the smoke spiralled above him."



Arthur and Leila Murray, photographed after the 1997 autopsy that revealed significant injury to Eddie's sternum. (The Northern Daily Leader, 24 September 2012)

Robert Cavanagh, Barrister: "Eddie Murray had a fractured sternum and that was not identified at the time of either the inquest or the royal commission. How that injury occurred is very important to know. It's most likely caused by a blow."

Dr Johan Duflou, NSW Institute of Forensic Medicine: "The most likely cause of the fracture of the sternum is one or more blows to the chest some time prior to death."

Professor Nikolai Bogduk, Professor of Anatomy and Musculoskeletal Medicine: "An individual with a fractured sternum would have their chest pain strongly aggravated by movements such as lifting the arms above the head to hold or pull objects. What we take for granted when reaching up, in terms of being able to balance the upper limb as we reach up or out, would be impaired."

Barrister Robert Cavanagh, who was acting for the Murray family, said that had this injury been identified, more investigation and the calling of further witnesses would have occurred.

On January 20, 1998, the then state coroner, Derrick Hand, stated that he was "satisfied there is no new evidence or facts making it necessary or desirable in the interests of justice to hold a fresh inquest".

His successor reasserted this position. The new state coroner, John Abernethy, was also not prepared to re-open the case saying the excavator used to exhume Eddie's body in the Wee Waa cemetery in 1997 could have crushed his chest. He closed the case. This is a somewhat ridiculous assertion since this could be reliably established if the investigation was allowed to proceed. His speculation could have been put to the test.

Twice now, the courts have returned an inconclusive verdict for lack of clear evidence. The fundamental questions of how, when, where and why Eddie Murray died in police custody have not yet been answered. Any conclusions arrived at up to this point in time are now subject to serious doubt, especially the notion that Eddie died by hanging and also that he caused his own death.

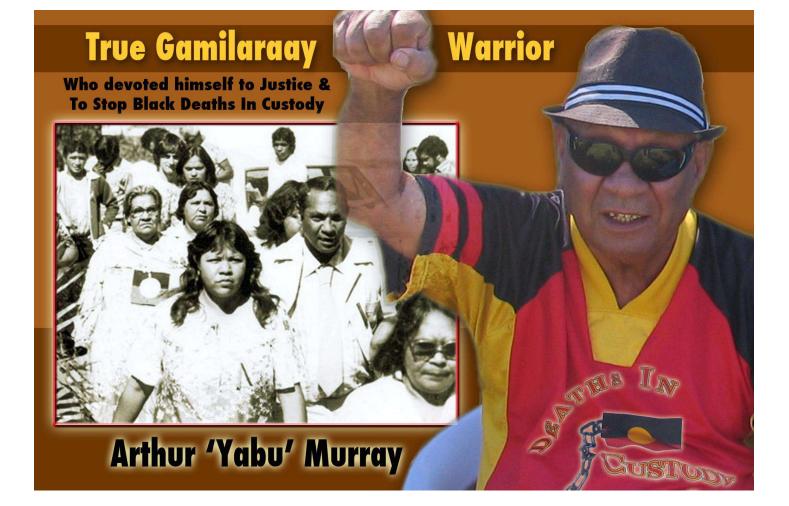
The coroner's inconclusive findings at the inquest on 18 December 1981 still remains the official account of the manner and circumstances of Eddie Murray's death.

In August 2000, the NSW Minister for Police, Paul Whelan, referred the case to the NSW Police Integrity Commission but they 'declined the case'.

John Pilger: "Arthur is still fighting for justice. He's in his sixties. He's a respected elder, a hero. A few months ago, the police in Narrabri offered Arthur a lift home and instead took him for a violent ride in their bullwagon. He ended up in hospital, bruised and battered. That is how Australian heroes are treated. In the same week the police did this — as they do to black Australians, almost every day — Kevin Rudd said that his government, and I quote, "doesn't have a clear idea of what's happening on the ground" in Aboriginal Australia."

"How much information does the prime minister need? How many ideas? How many reports? How many royal commissions? How many inquests? How many funerals? Is he not aware that Australia appears on an international "shame list" for having failed to eradicate trachoma, a preventable disease of poverty that blinds Aboriginal children?"

John Pilger: "When I last saw Arthur, we walked down to the Namoi riverbank and he told me how the police in Wee Waa were still frightened to go into the cell where Eddie had died and had pleaded with him to 'smoke out' Eddie's spirit. 'No bloody way!' Arthur told them."



Lyall Munro Jnr : "Our kids should aspire to be like our heroes and Arthur Murray was one of those heroes."

On February 25, 2004, NSW Senator, Lee Rhiannon, chased down the call for a parliamentary inquiry into the death of Mr Murray but to no avail.

In many people's view, it is indisputable that Wee Waa police killed 21 year old Eddie Murray in a dastardly crime for which they were not held accountable.

Despite his injuries and state of acute intoxication (6 times the legal driving limit), the police would have us believe their story that Eddie had managed to tear a long strip from a thick woollen prison blanket, deftly fold it, balance on tip toes and with outstretched arms thread it through the tight space in a ventilation vent above the cell door, tie two knots, fashion a perfect noose and strangled himself with his feet still touching the ground.

Gerry Georgatos: "As a researcher into custodial systems, I have reviewed the death in custody and it appears Eddie Murray was murdered, call it manslaughter or grievous bodily harm leading to death. Until the police are brought to justice for these deaths then Anne Murray is right that there is no likelihood of a reduction of police deaths in custody."



Anne Murray: "It is time after 33 years, with so much pain and anguish for my mother and father who have now gone, that the first (successful) prosecution of murderous and lying police officers takes place – and we can get it."

"Times have changed where now there may be some hope for true justice in the Courts or for a full and proper investigation or some genuine independent public inquiry, with the evidence presented that in more racist times the evidence was glossed over."

"If my family give up, which we will never do, then that first (successful) prosecution of coppers will keep on waiting and there will be more deaths in custody. We get that first justice and the black deaths in custody will stop."



compiled by Peter Gray (2015)